

THE APPEARED
IN PAGE 30.

NEWSWEEK
31 March 1986

STAT

INTERNATIONAL

U.S.-Soviet Relations: On Hold

Moscow plays for time

Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev have returned to the old superpower game of feint and counterpunch. In recent weeks the president has ordered the Soviets to trim their U.N. missions, sent two U.S. Navy ships into Soviet waters in the Black Sea and used tough anti-Soviet rhetoric in calling for stepped-up military aid to guerrillas in Afghanistan, Angola and Nicaragua. In reply, Gorbachev has beefed up support for Libya, Syria, North Korea, Angola and Nicaragua. He has dabbled in the Middle East and the South Pacific, and he is courting left-wing politicians in Europe.

A number of Western experts believe that Gorbachev has concluded there is little hope of getting Reagan to approve an acceptable arms-control treaty—one that would cripple Reagan's Star Wars proposal and reduce the Pentagon budget. The analysts predict Gorbachev will not offer any major initiatives until 1989, hoping that American Democrats and British Laborites might win and prove more conciliatory than Reagan or Margaret Thatcher. The Soviets may make cosmetic arms-control proposals, if only so they can blame the West for rejecting them. At the same time some Pentagon experts expect Moscow to hold its military spending to annual increases of one-half to 1 percent for the next few years.



GAMMA-LIAISON

Cautious jockeying: Gorbachev

Such a holding pattern could buy Gorbachev valuable time. He needs to master the intricacies of foreign affairs. He also may be able to defer key decisions on military spending for a few years while he focuses on reviving the Soviet economy. "The major change in Soviet defense spending will come when Gorbachev decides either that the next U.S. president won't give up on SDI or that the program has so much momentum it can't be stopped," says a top British Kremlinologist.

While he stalls, Gorbachev has tried a few diplomatic forays on the side. He has given increased attention to Western Europe and Japan—both sources of valuable technology and capital. He spent an entire afternoon with a delegation of Cypriot

communists. British Labor Party visitors to the 27th Party Congress in Moscow found themselves upgraded to a better hotel. Gorbachev also has been paying more attention to the nonaligned countries, telling six of their leaders recently that he would extend a Soviet moratorium on nuclear tests in answer to their requests.

Soviet competition with the United States is already growing sharper in the Third World. U.S. intelligence sources say that if Congress eventually votes military aid to the contras, the Soviets may approve the transfer of Czechoslovak-made L-39 jets to the Sandinistas—a move that would test Washington's public warnings about "high-performance aircraft" in Nicaragua. U.S. experts say the Soviets have made it clear that they have no intention of withdrawing their troops from Afghanistan as long as Muslim rebels continue to receive outside help. In Angola, U.S. and South African officials believe, Soviet advisers are serving at the regimental level and Soviet pilots are flying Angolan planes against the U.S.-backed UNITA rebels. "The Soviets are not going to back down," says Kurt M. Campbell of Harvard University's Center for Science and International Affairs.

So far, Gorbachev's maneuvers in the Third World appear calculated not to provoke a confrontation with Reagan. In Libya, Western intelligence sources say, the Soviets have deployed new SAM-5 anti-aircraft missiles where they can't reach the area in which U.S. planes normally operate. At the recent Party Congress Gorbachev failed to proclaim Moscow's traditional support for "wars of national liberation," and Western experts believe he is reluctant to adopt any new clients in faraway places. Still, even cautious jockeying might someday get out of hand if both sides allow their relationship to deteriorate the way it is now.

JOHN WALCOTT in Washington